

FIELD

Le favori des Femmes et des Enfants

LIONEL L'HOMME-LION

mi homme
mi lion
né en Russie



**âgé de 18 ans
vivant.**



FIELD

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W. S. Merwin

GOING FROM THE GREEN WINDOW

Saying to the square that is always open good-bye
is uprooting my own foot
I never remembered the root starting
there is nothing to say good-bye to

In a room of wind and unabiding
in mid-air like a leg walking
in a turning place where boxes have stayed packed for
years
where in storms the walls bleed
over the flooded floors
where at all hours constellations
of black cows wait round about
growing on the hill of grass

I watch through dark leaves once
those shadows in the day pasture
moving slowly to drink on the way to the big tree
this morning

ISOLATED SWEDISH HOUSES

Confused heap of black spruce
and smoking moonbeams.
Here is a shrunken crofter's holding,
with no signs of life.

Until the dew hums
and with a shaky hand
an old person opens the window,
lets out a horned owl.

In another direction
a new building steams
with a linen butterfly
flapping at its edge

in the dying forest, where
decomposition is reading
reports from bark beetles
through glasses of sap.

Flaxen-haired summer rains
or a single thundercloud
above a barking dog.
A seed is kicking in the earth.

Distorted voices, faces
fly through telephone lines
with shrunken quick wings
over miles of bog.

The house on the river island
broods on its foundation stones.
A continuous smoke—the secret papers
of the forest are burning.

Rain turns in the sky.
Light twists through the river.
From the mountain slope, houses watch over
the white oxen in the waterfall.

Autumn's gang of starlings
holds dawn in check.
Indoors, people move stiffly
in the theatre of their window lamps.

Untie their worries, let them feel
the camouflaged wings
and God's energy
rolled up in the dark.

FORMULAS OF THE TRIP

(from the Balkans, '55)

1.

A hum of voices follows the plowman.
He doesn't look back. The fields are empty.
A hum of voices follows the plowman.
One by one the shadows untie themselves,
plunging headlong into summer's deep sky.

2.

Four oxen appear under heaven.
Nothing proud about them. Dust thick as wool.
Insects are scratching with their pencils.

A herd of horses, bone thin
as in gray allegories of the plague.
Nothing soft about them. The sun whirling.

3.

Smell of hay, manure, town with skinny dogs.
The party official in the market square
of the hay-smelling town with white houses.

His heaven is following him: it's high
and narrow, like inside a minaret.
On the mountain slope, the town drags its wings.

4.

An old house has blown its brains out.
Two boys are playing kickball in the dusk.
A swarm of quick echoes—the stars light up.

5.

On my way through the long darkness. Stubbornly
my watch is gleaming with time's captured insect.

This packed compartment is heavy with silence.
In the dark, meadows are streaming past.

But the writer is halfway through his picture,
travels as both the eagle and the mole.

translated by Timothy Dwyer

THE LAST POEM ABOUT THE SNOW QUEEN

*Then it was that little Gerda walked into the Palace,
through the great gates, in a biting wind. . . . She saw
Kay, and knew him at once; she flung her arms round his
neck, held him fast, and cried, "Kay, little Kay, have I found
you at last?"*

But he sat still, rigid and cold.

—Hans Christian Andersen, "The Snow Queen"

You wanted to know "love" in all its habitats, wanted
to catalog the joints, the parts, the motions, wanted
to be a scientist of romance: you said
you had to study everything, go everywhere,
even here, even
this ice palace in the far north.

You said you were ready, you'd be careful.
Smart girl, you wore two cardigans, a turtleneck,
furlined boots, scarves,
a stocking cap with jinglebells.
And over the ice you came, gay as Santa,
singing and bringing gifts.

Ah, but the journey was long, so much longer
than you'd expected, and the air so thin,
the sky so high and black.
What are these cold needles, what are these shafts of ice,
you wondered on the fourteenth day.
What are those tracks that glitter overhead?

The one you came to see was silent,
he wouldn't say "stars" or "snow,"
wouldn't point south, wouldn't teach survival.
And you'd lost your boots, your furs,
now you were barefoot on the icefloes, fingers blue,
tears freezing and fusing your eyelids.

Now you know: this is the place
where water insists on being ice,
where wind insists on breathlessness,
where the will of the cold is so strong
that even the stone's desire for heat
is driven into the eye of night.

What will you do now, little Gerda?
Kay and the Snow Queen are one, they're a single
pillar of ice, a throne of silence—
and they love you
the way the teeth of winter
love the last red shred of November.

ACCIDENT

Something rushes out of the black broth
at the other end of the road, a red needle,
sirens weeping, splotches of light

punching holes in silence.
We slow down to a clumsy procession
and shamle hood to hull

past the theatre of blood on the dirt shoulder
where pale curved shapes arrange themselves
above flat black ones.

Stretchers, broken glass, a bashed VW—
if we could all get out and tiptoe past
we all would:

I feel the old wound in my eyelid
opening again, the slit
that lets in darkness

and shows me how it took an hour for forty cars
to press the dead deer on yesterday's road
into a dull mat,

the slit of vision
keen as a splinter that goes in and in
and still more deeply in.

PINOCCHIO

i

Eyes on a slab of wood,
Giapetto's gaze,

as if through all those obstinate
layers, grainy veils,

film on film of forest, spring, fall,
root, bole, burl,

Pinocchio's wide round painted eyes
met his eyes.

ii

Boys romp in the roadway. Pinocchio
romps and clatters. Overhead
April rattles chestnut, cypress, pine.
When Pinocchio looks at the forest

does he see his cousins?
Does he dream a tickle of moss
on his shiny scalp?
He creaks in his sleep!

iii

Ill wood, ill wind, all nose
for sniffing out what's done, what's dung,

Pinocchio drifts in the jaws of winter,
fish or father, whale or wave:

everything's black down here,
nothing to touch except

the teeth of water.

This is the world, digesting

him, he thinks. Soon he'll be
a stump, a plank, driftwood, deadwood,

then a skin of paper, then a word:
and why? what was "the truth" anyway?

iv

A field. A hut. A hearth.
An iron grate. Flames, ashes.

Crows clack in the field, their gullets
open and close, ancient gates.

In the hearth ashes toss and shift,
flames mutter, wooden shapes spatter,

simmer: their sap gasps
bleak phrases: *Lies, all lies.*

Noses are lies. Breath.
Fathers. Forests.

v

Giapetto paces leafy tunnels,
muses, sees
a hillside full of boys
disguised as trees.

THE PARACHUTIST'S WIFE

i

Six men turned to smoke in the next square
of air, their plane became wind.
You were twentythree. Hands over your ears, a roaring
in your veins, a silence
on the radio.

Flak

knocked twice at the cockpit,
dull knuckles, thumping:

Let me in,

let me in.

You knew you had to
give yourself to the sky the way we
give ourselves to music—no knowing
the end of the next bar, no figuring
how the chord will fall.

ii

The clouds were cold, the plane trembled.
You pulled the cord and the chute
“bloomed like God’s love,” a heavenly
jockstrap anchoring you in air.

You were happy, you say, you were
never happier than that day, falling
into birth: the archaic
blue-green map of Europe glowed below you.

You were going to camp, you were
going to be free of death.
The pull of the harness, the swaying,
the ropes creaking—it was so peaceful up there,

like a page of Greek or
an afternoon in a Zen monastery
or a long slow stroll around
somebody's grandfather's garden.

iii

I'm quiet in my kitchen, I won't
bail out, I don't think it would be the same
for me, I think if I

fell like that the hands of flak
would strip me as I
swung from the finger of God, I'd

offer myself as a bright idea
and a chorus of guns
would stammer holes in my story, nothing

would lift me over the black fangs
of the Alps, I'd dangle
like bait and the savage

map of Europe would eat me up.
I stick like grease to my oven, I wear
a necklace of dust,

my feet root in green stone.
You've forgotten I'm here!
But every morning

there are crystals of ice in my hair
and a winter distance glitters
in the centers of my eyes.

I don't need to stroll through the sky
like a hero:
in my bone cave

I marry the wind.

—*for Mark Linenthal
and Frances Taffer*

TWENTY YEARS OF THE IMAGE: A *FIELD* SYMPOSIUM

Since a preoccupation with the image has been one of the leading characteristics of contemporary poetry for at least twenty years, the subject seems a natural one for the joint consideration of a symposium. Of the poets from whom we invited first responses, only two had replied by the time we had to go to press on the fall issue, but more essays have been promised for the spring issue, and we would like to encourage contributions from all interested readers. Responses can now take into account the preliminary questions we sent out — see below — as well as the initial responses by Louis Simpson and Charles Simic. A deadline of January 15 should be observed for the spring issue. If response warrants, we will continue the symposium through the following fall.

Here is the preliminary copy we sent out to selected poets for first responses:

For the last twenty years or so, the poetic image has amounted to something almost like an obsession with many contemporary poets. They have argued about its features, explored its mysteries, and generally made it the touchstone whereby they admire or dislike the work of other poets. But "image," by itself, means many things to many people, and misunderstandings of several sorts have arisen, partly because poets have been cryptic or inconsistent in their utterances, often because well-intentioned but poorly informed critics have attempted to codify and categorize. This seems like a good time, then, to ask the poets, the practitioners, what they think. We have put our challenge in a series of questions, inviting respondents to answer any or all of the questions in the form of a short essay.

What does "image" mean to you, as a reader of poetry and as a working poet? Has its meaning changed for you and/or your work during the period 1960-1980? Is it an alternative

term for "metaphor" or "figurative language," or are its implications different, either broader or narrower? What relation does the term have for you to the movement called Imagism? Do you use, in talking about poetry, your own or that of others, terms like "Deep Image," "surrealist image," and the like? To put it another way, do you think of images in terms of kinds and categories?

Has the concentration on imagery in our time been mainly beneficial? Mainly harmful? Do you see any shift occurring in poetry's preoccupation with the image? In your own work? In the work of others? Do you tend to think that image-oriented poetry constitutes a phase or a fashion, or do you see it as a discovery or recovery of what is most central and enduring in poetry? Which of your contemporaries have meant the most to you in their use of (mastery over, experimentation with) images? Which poets not your contemporaries? What aspects of imagery, as you know them in the poetry of the past two decades, do you most dislike or distrust?

IMAGES

The discussion of images that began in American poetry around 1910 may be a reflection of twentieth-century man's inability to make general statements in the face of a world that is increasingly unsure. We don't know what to believe, so we make an image.

Which is a sin, according to Scripture: "You shall not make graven images."

But the image according to Pound isn't graven — it is "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." Also, "One is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective."

The image of the Imagists is a moment of perception, a movement of some sort. It is not just a sensation, a thing perceived by the senses. "Images in verse," said Hulme, "are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive language."

How does it work? The image as we have it from the Imagists and, ten years later, the Surrealists, is composed by bringing two entities together. Or three, or a dozen. The mind flies from one to the other.

In metaphor we are made to see the similarity between one thing and another: "My love is like a red, red rose." Metaphor suggests that things are really the same.

The image of the Imagists also brings different things together, but it doesn't merge them. Instead, a third thing is created . . . something unexpected. In Pound's famous poem about faces in a Metro station, the third thing is a black bough with petals. The faces of the people in the station have vanished, the station has vanished, to be replaced by a wet, black bough.

Surrealism uses the same technique, with this difference. The third thing is not like anything that we have seen or heard — it is not in nature, but purely invented.

The sphere, colored orange, floating in space
has a face with fixed brown eyes.

Below the sphere a shirt with a tie

in a dark, formal suit
stands facing you, close to the parapet
on the edge of the canyon.

Moreover, as the aim of Surrealism is to surprise, the further apart things are, the more astonishing the effect when you juxtapose them. André Breton said, "To compare two subjects as distant as possible one from the other, or, by any other method, to bring them face to face, remains the highest task to which poetry can aspire."

Bringing together objects that appear to have nothing in common . . . this is the main Surrealist technique. It can be used mechanically, like every other poetic device, until it has lost its power to surprise. In the hands of a gifted poet, however, the technique can still produce the "intuition" of which Hulme spoke, Pound's "intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."

Juxtaposition of far-removed entities compels us to recognize that the mind is capable of anything and is its own master. "Man is the creator of values, which have their sense only from him and relative to him."

But here we are confronted with a difficulty. If the mind is absolute master, aren't all images equally good? All poets equally interesting? But anyone who reads Surrealist poems, or poetry of any kind, soon realises that some poets are more interesting than others: their images arouse more feeling, yield more pleasure, a keener surprise.

The painter Magritte said, "There exists a secret affinity between certain images; it holds equally for the objects represented by these images." I would put it another way: There is a secret affinity between objects, and if you perceive it your images will be alive.

But doesn't this talk of affinities bring us back to metaphor, a way of showing a likeness between things? Yes, the aim in creating metaphors or creating Symbolist, Imagist or Surrealist images is the same: to show a meaning behind the veil of appearances. What difference is there between Baudelaire's forest, beloved of Symbolist poets, full of symbols that watch him with

knowing eyes, and Breton's "facts which . . . present all the appearances of a signal"? In each case the poet is the receiver of signals from Beyond.

The images, however, are different. The image of the Symbolist, taken from the world perceived by the senses, is composed so as to evoke a trance-like state in the reader. The Symbolist image takes you away from the world, to the Over-Soul. The Symbolist poet would evade the world entirely, if he could.

The Imagist poet on the other hand believes with Hulme in a clear separation of earth and heaven. The image is a quick opening into another order of reality. Then it closes again. But, again, the principle is to show you something. Not just the sea and the pines . . . it is to be an "intuition."

The Surrealists went one better. The image would be entirely original, like nothing ever seen on earth. Again, however, the aim was the same: to reveal "a kind of absolute reality."

Whether we are speaking of Symbolist, Imagist or Surrealist poets, it is their perception of affinities that is important. This is why some poets' images are alive. The poet has seen something happening between objects. Or the movement may be between ideas, as in Pound's *Cantos*.

In Williams' and Olson's theory of the poem as "a field of action," the poet himself is seen as an object in the field, interacting with other objects. I don't see why human beings have to be thought of as objects . . . I would think it fairly obvious that they aren't . . . but, in any case, in field theory also you are perceiving affinities. This is what the field looks like: juxtaposition of objects and a movement between them. A significance.

The poet's ability to see and feel affinities counts for much — some would say, for everything. In the hands of a poet such as Wordsworth, writing about the "spots of time," or Pound in some of the *Cantos*, images may evoke the supernatural.

. . . juxtaposition will be used to show metamorphosis, the changing of one thing into another, the breaking of solid surfaces that allows a permanent idea or god to emerge. ("A god is an eternal state of mind.") . . . Pound's image, composed of parts in an active relationship, allows the supernatural to be seen. The

image is an opening, "a 'magic moment' or moment of metamorphosis, bust thru from quotidien into 'divine' or permanent world.' Gods, etc." The eyes of a sea beast become the eyes of a girl, and these are the eyes of Helen, "destroyer of men and cities."*

American poets are still walking in the paths trodden by the Symbolists, Imagists and Surrealists. They have found new names . . . the "deep image," for example, to describe images with a certain psychological resonance or dream-like quality. But only the name is new . . . "deep images" were created by poets writing many years ago.

* The author, *Three on the Tower*.

IMAGES AND "IMAGES"

"Madame X is installing a piano in the Alps."

Rimbaud

*"The more impossible the problem,
the more poetical the possibilities.
An ideal situation."*

Carl Rakosi

Image: to make visible . . . What?

To re-enact the act of attention.

The duration of the act itself as the frame (the field) of the image.

The intensity of the act as the source of "Illumination."

In Imagism, the faith that this complex event can be transcribed to the page without appreciable loss.

Something as simple and as difficult as a pebble in a stream. The instant when it ceases to be anonymous and becomes an "object of love." A longing to catch *that* in its difference and kind . . . A glimpse of the world untainted by subjectivity.

In such a "frame" analogies would be an interference, a distortion.

One wants the object looked *at*, not *through*.

A pebble stripped of its figurative and symbolic dimensions.

An homage to the pleasures of clear sight.

Nevertheless — the "image." The hunch that there's more here than meets the eye. The nagging sense that the object is "concealed" by its appearance. The possibility that I am participating in a meaning to which this act is only a clue. In short, is one an impartial witness, or is the object a mirror in which one occasionally catches sight of oneself imagining that impartiality?

To be conscious is to experience a distancing. One is neither World, nor Language, nor Self. One *is*, and one *is not*. It seems incredible that any of these could be accurately rendered by merely listing the attributes. "Listing" implies order, linearity, time . . . The experience is that of everything occurring simultaneously.

This is not something of which one can form an image by imagist means. However, since one needs to talk even about the incommunicable, one says, it is *like* . . . With that little word, of course, one has already changed the manner in which one proposes to represent the world.

If the source of light for the imagist image is the act of attention, in the universe of radical metaphor, the cause is the faith in the ultimate resemblance (identity) of everything existing and everything imagined.

The "image" is the glimpse of the "Demon of Analogy" at work. He works in the dark, as the alchemists knew.

To assert that A is B involves a risk — especially, if one admits the extent to which the act is involuntary. One cannot anticipate figures of speech. They occur — out of a semantic need. The true risk, however, is in the critique the "image" performs on Language as the shrine of all the habitual ways of representing reality.

This is its famous "Logic." The "image" never generalizes. In each entity, it detects a unique (local) logic. (A pebble does not think as a man or a stream does. It "thinks" as a pebble.) Michaux and Edson are masters of such dialectic.

It all depends on how seriously one takes the consequences of one's poetics.

The secret ambition of "image" — making is gnosis — an irreverence which is the result of the most exalted seriousness. One transgresses as one recognizes the rules by which one lives.

The "image" might come to one in a strange and mysterious way, but it's no longer possible to offer it to the world in that spirit. To know history, even literary history, is to lose innocence and begin to ponder what the "images" are saying.

"Resemble assemble reply," says Gertrude Stein. Today to make an "image" is to make a theatre. On its stage, the old goat-faced Socrates, the philosophic clown, is taking a bow.

Thus, it's not so much *what* the "image" says, but *how* it works that is interesting. Its geometry, astronomy, zoology, psychology, etc. . . .

Poets can be classified by how much faith they have in truth via "images." It's for the sake of Truth that one makes one's grandmother ride a giraffe — or one does not.

Besides, any day now, "images" will attack poets and demand that they fulfill their promises.

I am not the first one to have said this.

Benjamin Péret

BADLY SHAVEN

A chicken paces back and forth in a snuffbox
which is a very fitting burial place
for a polishing brush
broken-toothed like the minister of agriculture
and so feeble
you would want to hang it
like a sack of onions from the edge of the roof
to chase away the swallows
that without that would come to nip at our heels
to make us mourn for the doubledecker bus
and the Jamaican woman
who sleeps by the fireside and wonders why there aren't more
often
railroad catastrophes
where hundreds of pilgrims on their way to Lourdes
once and for all make the virtuous slugs dream
which having rotted for seven centuries
and already transformed into white hair after having abandoned
the skull of some poor guy
so they could stare into space
begin to wonder about what could have happened
to their trouser button
otherwise so well groomed and clean shaven
that even from close up
you'd mistake it for a rose porcelain washing basin
motheaten
and yet still ready to undertake the cross-France bicycle race
on foot
like a French fry

NEBULOUS

When the night of butter coming out of the churn
drowns the moles of the train terminals with eyes that trumpet
and grow larger like a subway station that approaches
and reclaims your image
which spins in my head like a heliotrope demented by seasickness
all your collar buttons jump off like lambs perched on a keg of
gunpowder
and hurl tremendous streams of ties far away into the distance
but you go by like a current of air filled with dew from the wings
of flaring lamps
and you close the door with a sound like a shovel burying a potato
the door of a mine shaft
the door of an estranged province
where I roam in the whirlpools of your looks
which turn green on all the trees and become blue between them
and keep setting up yards of wrecking companies in the middle of
the forests
where the most beautiful breasts in the world open up halfway to
shout out No
while shaking their black sun hair
which illuminates a downpour going over the embankment
when the drop of water of your feet lands there
like the busy signal in an ear
that the wait has already turned into a lookout tower crawling
with rats which gnaw away at it
before it turns into a laundry boat run aground on a deserted
island
or a sailboat left behind in a sleeping car of a train
No it's only a bunch of radishes which dry out like some president
of the Republic
until they are transformed into a deserted and white public
square
lined with a palace made out of fluorescent mica
where
in the middle of some threshing machines that are rusty

and being devoured by flowering honeysuckle
suddenly a column of blood and forget-me-nots will spurt up in
the shape of your hands and wearing phosphorus yesses
that will create vast northern lights made out of ostrich feathers
and peaches
growing wider like a sea that you don't want to cross
and which yap at your feet like a conch
where the echo of your voice finds itself

HELLO

My plane in flames my castle flooded with Rhine wine
my ghetto of black irises my crystal ear
my rock tumbling over the cliff to crush the local policeman
my opal snail my mosquito made out of air
my bird of paradise comforter my head of black foam hair
my exploding grave my rain of red grasshoppers
my flying island my turquoise grape
my collision of crazy and cautious autos my wild flower bed
my dandelion pistil hurled into my eye
my tulip bulb in my brain
my gazelle gone astray in a movie theater off the boulevards
my cashbox of sunshine my volcano fruit
my laugh of a hidden pond where the absent-minded prophets go
to drown themselves
my deluge of black currants my morel butterfly
my waterfall blue as a tidal wave which brings on spring
my coral revolver whose mouth attracts me like the eye of a well
sparkling
frozen like the mirror in which you contemplate the flight of
hummingbirds of your glance
lost in a white sale bordered by mummies
I love you

translated by Keith Hollaman

Miroslav Holub

A SPECIAL PERFORMANCE FOR STATUES

Solitary statues are introduced into the orchestra, while groups of statues are in the boxes. Someone remembers that bigger statues may not obstruct the sight of the smaller ones. Very small statues are permitted only in the suite of the non-figurative compositions.

In the first act, there's nothing on the stage. The statues don't like much movement and racket. Vibrations damage their crystalline structures.

In the second act, a black-rock quarry is opened onstage. The rock is torn off the walls and shaped by hammers and chisels. When the shape is born, a pyrotechnist comes along and skillfully places the charges and sets them off. The statues don't like repetitions of their likeness. The statues don't like themselves at all, essentially.

In the third act, a big flock of seagulls is onstage. The birds are spooked by the haze coming from a symphony orchestra down in the trap, and they fly around and into the audience, settling on the statues' heads. There they do the natural things they usually do. The whole scene is irresistible fun. The statues applaud with a minute of silence.

After the performance, the theater is changed into a museum.

Therefore, theaters disappear.

But in the review, Venus of Milo praises the art of using gestures onstage and Nike of Samothrace expresses her satisfaction that the value of the human head is on the rise.

*translated by
Miroslav Holub and Stuart Friebert*

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*Who'll marry me? Cold Saturday. Will he leave me? With
the blinds halfpulled. How will I
Love him? Hastily. Now,
Can you finish your trip before dark?*

You must go by the top of the hill, the bus, the bridge,
the hedge, the bench;
There you'll be a child,
Your scrawny arms together,
Your hands clutching a pocketbook. You have a dime
and a nickel.
You're going
Down the road
Across the town
To the school, the store; you'll dance once across the
supermarket parking lot,
Flare like a lighted pinecone,
Fade dull gray.

And there your coffin will be waiting, old lady.
Row it home
With your own two hands.

Now who'll marry me?
The green man, with eyelashes like cornsilk, the tall
boy with the dripping wet hair, the
Lover with a valley full of wheat.

AGAIN

The rains are here; the frogs are absolutely unstoppable,
Shouting their fat green hearts out.

The frog prince strides over the treetops; he's
Twenty feet high and dressed in sopping green,
Booming his chorus: Not dead. Awake! Tall! Green!

All summer they slept, curled in on themselves for
the dry season,
Feeling nothing, with pores shrunk tight,
Waiting to grow like monstrous Japanese water flowers,
Stomp through the halls of sleep.

And maybe it will come for us too,

The night closing down around us, loose, heavy,
milky wet,

And all of our comrades calling,
Desperate,
New.

SUITOR

Is it a goat, a bear,
A man of straw with a new pocket handkerchief
Pinned over its right coat pocket?
Help me, it says, its painted face anxious as an owl's,
its eyes
Staring like blank white coat buttons.

And how could anyone resist? It's spring.
The Army planes practice their figures over the meadow,
The mountains line themselves up, sharp blue, with a
column of cloud above,

The ground's hot and flaky, and the suitor
With straw poking out of his throat
Contorts his vague soft knees, pulls on his lips.

It would melt the heart in your chest, if you had a
heart, so
Make up your mind, lady. What's under your shirt?
Does something thump there?
Hold out your hand to the white-eyed man.

TO SEE THE STARS IN DAYLIGHT

You have to go down
in a deep mine-shaft or a well,

down where you can imagine the incomparable
piety of the schoolbus,
the wherewithall of bees,

down where you can be a drawer full of dust
as night comes on under full-sail,

and the smooth rain,
in its beautiful armor,
stands-by forever.

I believe
there's a fiddle in the wings

whose music is full of holes
and principles beyond reason.
It binds our baleful human hearts

to wristwatches and planets,
it breaks into fragments which are not random.

The girl in the white dress kneels by the riverbank
and, like the willow, leans
and trails her fingers in the current.

She doesn't know about the damsel fly, exquisitely blue,
that has fallen asleep on her pillow.

FIRST GODDESS: DEVERRA

The string broke.
The beads scattered.
I could never collect my wits
if not for you, Deverra,

inventor of brooms.
What worries my feet
is brushed aside.

By moonlight I make
a clean sweep;
ten blue beads,
two pennies,

and a silver pin.
"There is great luck in pins,"
says my mother,

an honest woman
who never lets a pin lie,
not even a crooked one.
"Sweep dust out the door

and you lose your luck,"
says my grandmother,
the unconsecrated Bishop of Dust

and Advisor to Ashes,
herding the lowly together
from dust to dust.
"Don't throw yourself away

on the first man that asks you.”
Outside, rain glistens.
I am patient as cats’ tongues.

By moonlight I take stock.
Kneeling in dust
at this miniature market,
I pick and choose.

What is lost to sight
is not lost, says the moon,
rinsed clear

as if my mother
rode her broom over it,
lifting the clouds
and letting down

columns of moonlight.
A little temple.
A little night music.

SECOND GODDESS: JUNO LUCINA

By moonlight I see
the anger of shoes,
their laces clenched into knots.

I take the shoes in my lap.
I loosen their tongues.
I take both sides

of the quarrel:
left strand,
right strand.

"When you were born," says my mother,
"the midwife untied
shoes, curtains,

everything."
Nevertheless, I came
with a cord round my neck,

tied like a dog
to my mother's darkness.
The goddess found me.

Her left hand carried the moon,
her right hand lay open like a flower,
empty. Feet first, I followed.

The midwife knocked
breath into me
and knotted that cord for good.

Hush, said the goddess.
Your mother's calling.
You can make it alone now.

NO-KINGS AND THE CALLING OF SPIRITS

The first stringent rule in Ireland was that no one with a physical blemish could rule as king. The historic King Cormac was forced to abdicate when he lost an eye . . .

Celtic Mysteries: The Ancient Religion.

My cat can look at a king
but can never be
king of his own kind,
this hero of the highway,
spinner
and winner
under the dark wheels.

A real loser:
one eye's stitched over
a dark hole.
One tooth icicles out.
His jaw mended badly.
"On our right we have
Doctor Jekyll,

on our left, Mr. Hyde,"
says my small brother
who can never be
king of the mountain.
"With his right he'll hear
radios, birds.
With his left, silence,"

says the doctor,
tracing horizons
on a graph designed
to unravel improvement.
I think of losses
greater than his:
lives, limbs, a mind fallen

asleep. I think of the reasons
for giving up
yourself
or a part of yourself,
your eye for an eye,
your arm to an enemy,
your liver and lights

to disease.

I think of wisdom,
its peddlers
and prices.

I think of Odin
who traded his eye for it
and how only then

did the other eye show him
spirits,
their beauty grazing
the mountains,
their shadows skimming his heart.
At a dark hole my one-eyed cat
worships the invisible mouse.

Little brother,
gifted with silence,
watch over us hunters,
watch over our hands,
our holding on
and our letting go
and our letting go

THREE PRIVATE MADRIGALS

1

I know that a ray of sunlight
can still be an incarnation
if there at the base of Lucrece's statue
(one evening she stirred and blinked)
you turn your face towards mine.

Here in the entryway, as out in the clover;
here on the steps as there on the landing;
always in shadows:
and when you let that darkness loose
my swallow turns into a hawk.

2

You gave my name to a tree? That's not much;
and I'm not resigned to remaining
a shadow or a trunk
abandoned in the suburbs. As for yours
I've given it to a river, to a long fire, to the crude
game of my luck, to the superhuman
faith with which you spoke to the toad
that came out of the sewer, without horror or pity
or exultation, to the breath of those strong
soft lips of yours that succeed,
by naming, in creating: toad flower grass reef—
oak ready to unfurl overhead
when the rain prunes the meaty
petals of the clover and the fire grows.

If they've compared you to a fox
 it's probably for your wonderful
 leaps, for the flight of your step
 that unites and divides, that upsets
 and invigorates the paving (your terrace,
 the streets near Cottolengo, the lawns,
 the tree that has my name would vibrate to them,
 happy, damp and overcome) — or maybe only
 for the luminous wave that you spread
 from the delicate almonds of your eyes,
 for the cunning of your quick surprises,
 for the agony
 of torn feathers that you offer
 in your infant hand-shake;
 if they've compared you
 to a tawny carnivore, treacherous genius
 of the brambles (and why not to that dirty
 fish that gives a shock, the sting-ray?)
 it's probably because the blind didn't see
 wings on your graceful shoulders
 because the blind didn't see the omen
 of your incandescent brow, the furrow
 I scratched in blood, confirmation cross
 enchantment calamity vow farewell
 perdition or salvation; if they haven't known better
 than to think you a weasel or a lady,
 with whom will I share my discovery,
 where will I bury the gold I carry,
 where the embers that rattle in me when,
 leaving me, you turn away from the steps?

translated by
Vinio Rossi and David Young

HERE AND THERE:
The Use of Place in Contemporary Poetry

I

There is an old Hasidic story that Gershom Scholem has retold:

When the Baal Shem had a difficult task before him, he would go to a certain place in the woods, light a fire and meditate in prayer — and what he had set out to perform was done. When a generation later the “Maggid” of Meseritz was faced with the same task he would go to the same place in the woods and say: We can no longer light the fire, but we can still speak the prayers —and what he wanted done became reality. Again a generation later Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov had to perform this task. And he too went into the woods and said: We can no longer light a fire, nor do we know the secret meditations belonging to the prayer, but we do know the place in the woods to which it all belongs — and that must be sufficient; and sufficient it was. But when another generation had passed and Rabbi Israel of Rishin was called upon to perform the task, he sat down on his golden chair in his castle and said: We cannot light the fire, we cannot speak the prayers, we do not know the place, but we can tell the story of how it was done.

Now, near the end of the twentieth century, we are even losing the story. So perhaps we must find the place again and start over. The Hebrew word for place, *makom*, is also one of the names of God. According to the Midrash, He is the place of the world.

David Ignatow has a poem that begins like this:

I have a place to come to.
It's my place. I come to it
morning, noon and night
and it is there. I expect it

to be there whether or not
it expects me — my place
where I start from and go
towards so that I know
where I am going and what
I am going from.

Perhaps this small poem can help me to define what the Baal Shem meant by place. It is a location with a strong personal meaning. "My place." It is set in time, in history: which means that events *happen* there. "Morning, noon and night" could be past, present, and future or the progression from birth to death. But it is also outside of time, simply by being there. Permanence within impermanence, a constant in a universe of flux, a fixed point that gives meaning to our movement through time and space, from beginning to end, from here to there. Call it God, call it center of being, place of the world. Call it Ignatow's room in New York where he writes his poems.

Yet Ignatow only speaks of his place in the abstract. It has no landscape (or cityscape) and no history. He does not see it, or smell it, or connect with it through memory or experience. I have been wondering why the work of many poets who are *not* Americans seems to have a different relationship to place. As if their breath, their language, their vision come from somewhere very real that surrounds and enters them. Who they are is where they are. Few Americans write out of this kind of necessity, a physical and emotional involvement with the places they know and return to. American women even less. I want to understand this.

II

George Seferis and a number of other contemporary Greek poets are like the Baal Shem. Their place in the woods of the world is Greece, with all that implies: the fire, the fuel for the fire, the gathering of myth and history, meditations and stories. Seferis writes in his journal of the days between 1945 and 1951 when he returned from exile to his home and left it again:

. . . I went out after noon; my first walk since I got sick. Anaphiotika, the Acropolis, the trees on the Areopagus, the grove of Philippapus. Light strong and pure, revealing everything with such astonishing clarity that I had the *serious* feeling of a sudden hallucination in broad daylight. Returning, as I was looking at the north side of the Acropolis, rocks and marble together with the Byzantine chapel below — just as one discerns faces and shapes on an old wall — I *saw* the tall skeleton of a woman, bones snow-white, looking at me with a proud air like the ghost of a hero. She looked from a world that was no longer of today, but a future world where nothing of what I know, things or persons, had survived. I felt the same love that I have now for life with all its beauties and evils — exactly the same love for this snow-white skeleton in the sun. These are strange things I've written and yet it *was* that way. I can't express it more precisely. I have the impression that I saw a moment of eternity.

An hallucination like the visions of the Hasidic rabbis. Out of a certain place. When Seferis returned to Athens after the Second World War, the months that followed were marked by civil war, Greeks fighting Greeks, political intrigue, government chaos, foreign intervention, and unmitigated suffering. All the agony of that time is in the journal. Together with the timeless. And drafts of poems.

On August 17, 1922 the Turks burned Smyrna to the ground and killed every Greek who had not fled. Seferis was born in the village of Skala outside of Smyrna in 1900, and although his family had left before that catastrophe, the destruction of Smyrna and its Greek community haunted him throughout his life. Twice in 1950, while he was working in the Greek embassy in Turkey, he returned to his first home. The pain of that encounter, as he records it in his journal, is almost too much to bear:

I've memorized the map of Smyrna from an 1898 English guidebook. I'm trying to apply this to both the ruined and the new buildings before me. I lie on my side on the beach and spread it out; then I abandon myself to the sorcery of memory. I think it was Alexandria which was compared to a cloak. Smyrna too is a cloak spread out as far as the castle of Pagus. Except that the whole center has been burned; the outskirts remain, and a huge pit which they have tried to patch with trees, kiosks, and other things with the plasticity of cement, and side boulevards that lead you to the despair of the roads of Giorgio de Chirico.

From our house I found myself suddenly at the Central School for Girls, one of the very few old buildings that have survived. As far as I can recall, in my day the two neighborhoods were some distance apart. You had to wind through alley after alley, see many windows and many faces, pass through so much life — in order to get from one to the other. Now, among these empty, intersecting streets, one stride seems enough; all the proportions have changed for me. You still pass by the burned debris (left by the fire of 1922) and piles of dirt which look like offal from the crude sprouting of reinforced concrete. And it seems only yesterday that the great ship was wrecked. I feel no hatred; what prevails within me is the opposite of hatred; an attempt to *comprehend* the mechanism of catastrophe.

Ruin and catastrophe. And the images from "so much life" passed through in those alleys of his childhood coming into the poetry. A place is not only a clearing in the woods, a dot on the map, a city, a village, a farm, a river, a neighborhood, a house. A place is what happens in it and the memories that flow from it. How far do the memories go?

III

What do I remember about Seattle where I grew up? Born to immigrant parents with a Polish-Russian-Austro-Hungarian Jewish background, I was educated in California and lived for twenty-seven years in San Francisco. A West Coast sensibility. I started another life in Jerusalem in 1973. Am I an American poet living in Israel? Or an Israeli poet writing in English?

When I was a child I remember spending our summers on Puget Sound or on the numberless small lakes around Seattle, and my father would take me out in a rowboat. Once I was standing on a dock where the water was slapping against the wood and the boats were tied up to pegs. My father was already seated in the leaky little boat, the tin can ready for my job which was to keep bailing out the water, the oars in their locks, as he worked at the knot around the peg. Just when I put my foot into the boat, he loosened the rope and pushed off. I swayed there for an instant, one foot in the boat, the other on the dock. "Jump in," he yelled as my legs were losing each other. I jumped, and fell into the water.

IV

Memory is always connected to a place. Kimon Friar has said that the closest links between modern and ancient Greece have little to do with refurbished myth. "The true perennial factor is Greece itself; that mountainous, harsh, limestone peninsula, with its scatter of islands, its violent storms, its white-washed chapels, its poverty, its superstitions." And, for Seferis, the landscape of Smyrna as well.

Seferis, writing about Cavafy, might be describing himself. He says, although "they talk about Cavafy's worship of Hellenism . . . (he) never loses touch with his own life; it burns him, and he knows it is exactly the same when he expresses it in the Alexandria of Lathyrus, the Antioch of Julian, or the area of Rue Lepsius. . . . What makes Cavafy interesting is this give and take of life he maintains with the world of the past."

"The world of the past" and "his own life." As Seferis in his poem "The King of Asine," exploring the ruined acropolis of Asine to recover "only one word in the Iliad," finds a gold burial mask and relates it to his present existence:

Behind the large eyes the curved lips the curls
carved in relief on the gold cover of our existence
a dark spot that you see trembling like a fish
in the dawn calm of the sea:
a void everywhere with us.

.....

and the country like a large plane-leaf swept along by
the torrent of the sun
with the ancient monuments and the contemporary
sorrow.

The past is so palpable, the lost grandeur of ancient Greek civilization, the memory of his lost home at Smyrna, Seferis feels that he touches with his own fingers the King of Asine's "touch upon the stones." The "dark spot," the "void everywhere with us" which he finds in the gold mask of Asine, seems like a mirror image of the passage quoted earlier from his journal where he perceives Smyrna as a cloak with the whole center burned, "a huge pit."

Or in "Thrush." The voice of a friend who gives him some "wood from a lemon-tree" is heard with the voices of the dead in Hades, voices from the Odyssey, from Socrates. Oedipus stares at him out of the sea where he looks at the wreck of a naval transport sunk in World War II.

When Seferis uses myth, the objects and place where he is dramatize his own state of consciousness. His personal identification cuts through time:

sometimes, near the sea, in naked rooms
with a single iron bed and nothing of my own
watching the evening spider, I imagine
that something is getting ready to come. . . .

Poets all over the world raid Greek mythology, for it is the symbolic heritage of western culture, but when Seferis uses it

the traditional figures are truly alive and part of his own landscape. They belong to the Greek poet writing in his own time as they belong to nobody else.

(When American poets work honestly with similar material, their mythical figures are somewhat different. Gerald Stern, in his wonderful poem "Too Much, Too Much," finds a dead spider in the pages of the "Philadelphia Inquirer" and evokes Turk Mendelsohn and Samuel Rappaport. He has a brass table instead of an iron bed.)

Seferis spent his childhood in Smyrna, his university years in Paris, and his mature life in various diplomatic posts. This wandering gave him the greatest longing and nostalgia for his own land. The poetry is suffused with exile. There are a few amazing poets to whom place means nothing — and everything, who live in a continual place of exile, homeless and yet at home, absorbing the humanity of the whole world into their art. St. John Perse, whose great poem "Exile" was written on the shores of New Jersey, was one of them. I think also of Yvan Goll's "Lackawanna Elegy," or Vallejo, and especially of Czeslaw Milosz.

Seferis is unique in that he alternated exile ("the world's become/a limitless hotel") with being uneasily "at home." Most of his poems struggle to define what it means to be Greek. He could lie in a room anywhere dreaming of Elpenor "with a cigarette butt between his lips," or Circe "gazing absently toward the gramophone." Elpenor, Circe, Seferis. They were in it together. Anywhere.

V

The wandering Greek. And the wandering Jew. Is that why the poems of Seferis have meant so much to me since I first read them in translation twenty years ago? The Greek summons Elpenor and Circe. What does it mean to be Greek? The Jew summons Abraham and Lot's wife. What does it mean to be Jewish? To return to the Jewish homeland? To be an Israeli?

. . . wandering around among broken stones, three or
six thousand years

searching in collapsed buildings that might have been
our homes

trying to remember dates and heroic deeds:
will we be able?

having been bound and scattered,
having struggled, as they said, with non-existent
difficulties

lost, then finding again a road full of blind regiments
sinking in marshes and in the lake of Marathon,
will we be able to die properly?

This fragment from Seferis' *Mythistorema* might have been written by an Israeli poet if we substitute sand and the Sinai desert for "marshes" and the "lake of Marathon." Just as Greek poets such as Seferis, Odysseus Elytis, Yannis Ritsos return again and again to their ancient history and literature to understand their relationship to the world, to give meaning to the suffering of their own time, to renew the legends and make them fresh again, to forge a link between the past and future — so, too, Israeli poets like Amir Gilboa, Abba Kovner, and Yehuda Amichai use the stories from their Hebrew Bible and Midrashic literature in contemporary terms. Their landscape is the old-new land of Israel. And it is very similar to Greece, with its sun-baked stones, olive, fig, and pomegranate trees, ancient ruins, Mediterranean light.

The generation of Israeli poets who were born in Europe and survived the holocaust, bringing with them the accumulated experience of the diaspora, like Seferis recalling Smyrna, like the three I have mentioned above, have never lost their sense of exile. Whatever simmers in the Jewish collective unconscious from the time of the destruction of the Temple and the first Exile, distilled through many exiles in many lands, becomes the actual exile in their own lifetime. Even the younger writers, born in Israel, feel, as Yoram Kaniuk said in a recent interview, that when they met the refugees from Europe and the ghosts and echoes they brought with them, "our personal biographies became interwoven with theirs . . . myth and autobiography became indistinguishable."

When Gilboa tells the story of Abraham and Isaac on their way to the famous sacrifice, they are not on the road to Mt. Moriah but in the forests of Europe under the Nazis, and in a terrible reversal of roles, it is Abraham who says: "It's I who am butchered, my son,/my blood is already on the leaves."

Kovner sees the ashes of his Vilna ghetto in the Sinai desert, and when he stands at midnight under the fluorescent street lamps of modern Jerusalem facing the Turkish walls of the old city, he asks:

Mount Zion, does it really exist
or is it like our love that glows from another light
rising night
after night.

Amichai regards Saul in his poem "King Saul and I" with the same kind of intimacy Seferis feels for Odysseus. Amichai:

He was my big brother
I got his used clothes.

Compare this to Seferis in "Upon A Foreign Verse":

I imagine he's coming to tell me how I too may build a
wooden horse to capture my own Troy.

Amichai's images are drawn from the entire lexicon of Jewish history together with the intensely experienced actuality of modern Israel — its loves, its wars, its terrorism, its absurdities. The past is always contained in the present.

In a long sequence by Amichai titled "Travels of a Latter-Day Benjamin of Tudela," there is one poem I'd like to quote in full:

I am sitting here now with my father's eyes,
and with my mother's greying hair,
in a house that belonged to an Arab
who bought it from an Englishman
who took it from a German
who hewed it from the stones
of Jerusalem, my city.
I look upon God's world of others
who received it from others.

I am composed of many times
I am constructed of spare parts
of decomposing materials
of disintegrating words. And already
in the middle of my life, I begin
gradually to return them,
for I want to be a decent and orderly person
when I'm asked at the border, "Have you anything to
declare?"
so that there won't be too much pressure at the end
so that I won't arrive sweaty and breathless and
confused
so that I shan't have anything left to declare.

When Amichai writes, "I am composed of many times," we know he feels it in his blood. "My father's eyes" are those of his real father, but they are also the eyes of THE FATHERS: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Amichai has written hauntingly of them, buried in their tombs in the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron, in another poem written after the 1967 war. And of the other MOTHERS. The burden of memory is too heavy to bear. There are too many "spare parts/ of decomposing materials."

In the poems of Amichai and these other Israeli poets their sense of history, their spiritual inheritance, their struggle for survival on every level, calls forth a nervous longing to make some sense of it all. Like Seferis, their work is filled with the tension of contradiction, the conflict of the past thousands of years with the impossible present and the timelessness of their own imaginations. They are able to use their ancient national literature to translate experience, to sift one layer of history through another and, in the process, illuminate each layer. And to let their myths use them. For them there is no conflict between the public and the private. And strongly located in place (chaotic as it is) and ancestral tradition, their voices resonate far beyond any borders.

VI

There is an interesting relationship between the work of Seferis and the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer in Tranströmer's cycle of poems *Baltics*. The *persona* in many of Seferis' poems is a sea-captain, the ghost of Odysseus, the mythical father. And it is Tranströmer's sea-captain grandfather who begins his exploration in *Baltics*. Seferis writes (in "Upon A Foreign Verse"): "how strangely you gain strength conversing with the/ dead when the living who remain are no longer/ enough." Here is what Seferis tells us about Odysseus' father:

. . . I still see his hands that knew how to judge
the carving of the mermaid at the prow
presenting me the waveless blue sea in the heart of winter.

And here is Tranströmer's grandfather:

He took them out to the Baltics, through
that wonderful labyrinth of islands and water.
.....
.....His eyes reading straight
into the invisible.

Like Seferis and the Israeli poets, Tranströmer also works toward an understanding of the alienated present through history, but it's family history, not the history of an ancient people. His place is an island in the archipelago off the east coast of Sweden where his family lived for many years and where he returns each summer. In *Baltics*, as he wanders over the island confronting the relics he finds there, the baptismal font "in the half dark corner of the Gotland church," reliving the death of his mother after a long illness, recalling his grandparents, experiencing a sense of the Baltics as frontier and route for communication, he seems to be passing through fear and hazard and sorrow to a place where he is at home in the difficult world. The island provides him with the necessary distance and isolation and restores a feeling of connection with the less temporal. "Only in-

side there is peace, in the water of the vessel no one sees, / but on the outer walls the struggle rages."

Robert Hass, in an illuminating article on *Baltics* and Tranströmer, writes that his work has always seemed that of a deeply rooted man:

Friends have told me about his Swedishness, in "Evening — Morning" for example, where the image of the dock and the half-suffocated summer gods seem inseparable from the paradisiacal long days of the short Swedish summer, and in "Sailor's Tale," how the *barvinterdager*, the dark winter days without snow in November and December are so central to the poem that it can almost not be felt without knowledge and experience.

Being completely local and rooted, yet despairing of where mankind is heading, when Tranströmer moves into himself in the fifth section of *Baltics*, the island, its wind, its sea, and its forest, surrounds and enters him:

The wind that blew so carefully all day —
all the blades of grass are counted on the furthest
islets —
has lain down in the middle of the island. The match-
stick's flame stands straight up.
The sea painting and the forest painting darken
together.
Also the foliage of the five story trees is turning black.
"Every summer is the last." These are empty words
for the creatures at late summer midnight
where the crickets sew on their machines as if possessed
and the Baltic's near
and the lonely water tap stands among the wild rose
bushes
like an equestrian statue. The water tastes of iron.

That taste, that image of the "possessed" crickets, the water tap as "an equestrian statue" caught in the wind and the light, the Baltic landscape — all these are strongly physical, as if the place and Tranströmer were one and the relationship were symbiotic.

The bond is memory, both recent and mythic, extending through all time and space.

At the end of *Baltics* he arrives at the two-hundred-year-old fisherman's hut which is the family house:

So much crouching wood. And on the roof the ancient
tiles that collapsed across and on top of each other
(the original pattern erased by the earth's rotation
through the years)

it reminds me of something . . . I was there . . . wait:
it's the old Jewish cemetery in Prague
where the dead live closer together than they did in life,
the stones jammed in, jammed in.

So much encircled love! The tiles with the lichen's let-
ters in an unknown language
are the stones in the archipelago people's ghetto ceme-
tery, the stones erected and fallen down —

The ramshackle hut shines
with the light of all the people carried by the certain
wave, the certain wind,
out there to their fates.

Finally the place — the certain wave, the certain wind, the
certain hut — joins him with "all the people."

VII

If poems come out of our whole being, out of much I have not dealt with here — imagination, intelligence, sensory perception, the music in our heads, a personal form and structure — and if we live in the world, why look for any specific place? The answer comes from Seferis and Amichai and Tranströmer. And the Baal Shem in the story with which I began. To be grounded. To be "in touch." To gather what's needed for the fire and light it. To know, as Ignatow's poem puts it: "where I am going and what/I am going from."

But how does one cope with America as a place? So huge. So diverse. So brief a history. In his poem "About History," Tranströmer says, "Memory is slowly transmitted into your own self." What happens when the memory is short?

Americans came to the New World rejecting history, rejecting the old ways. They wanted to make something new.

We want a national literature commensurate with our mountains and rivers . . . a national epic that shall correspond to the size of the country . . . and to the unparalleled activity of our people . . . In a word, we want a national literature altogether shaggy and unshorn, that shall shake the earth, like a herd of buffaloes thundering over the prairies.

These words were written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow 130 years ago, and he met his own challenge with *Hiawatha*. *Hiawatha!*

It was Whitman, of course, who opened his form to fit the place, who heard America singing and wrote it down. Beyond the flawed moments of bombast, he was always “of Manhattan the son,” although the only bookstore in New York that would sell *Leaves of Grass* when the first edition was printed in 1855 was a “phrenological depot” on Broadway, and a contemporary critic said he “combines the characteristics of a Concord philosopher with those of a New York fireman.” Whitman saw himself as the poet of the People and set out to “define America, her athletic Democracy” in his poems. “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem,” he said.

Calling Whitman “the first white aboriginal,” with “the true rhythm of the American continent speaking out of him,” D. H. Lawrence wrote:

And lots of new little poets camping on Whitman’s camping ground now. But none going really beyond. Because Whitman’s camp is at the end of the road, and on the edge of a great precipice. Over the precipice, blue distances, and the blue hollow of the future. And there is no way down. It is a dead end.

Was it a dead end? “The Open Road goes to the used-car lot,” Louis Simpson tells us.

American poets have been wandering down that road ever since. And it has led to a variety of strange places besides the

used-car lot. Most, since the ambitious failures of Hart Crane or Sandburg, and leaving aside the ex-patriates Pound and Eliot, have limited themselves to a smaller territory than the whole of America, because the whole is unmanageable. One city, one state, one region is more like the size of Greece or Israel or Sweden, and possible to encompass. So Frost, born in San Francisco, returned to the animals, trees, barns, voices of his father's first home in New England. Williams, continuing Whitman's search for new forms and wanting to record the living language exactly as it was spoken, insisted even more on the local. The open road led to *Paterson* and the "radiant gist." From there Olson took it to Gloucester, writing in "Maximus to Gloucester, Letter 27 (Withheld)":

An American

is a complex of occasions,
themselves a geometry
of spatial nature.

I have this sense,
that I am one
with my skin

Plus this — plus this:
that forever the geography
which leans in
on me I compel
backwards I compel Gloucester
to yield, to
change

Polis
is this

This poem seems to contradict the feeling I get from the European poets, the Greek, the Israeli — that they do not have to "compel" their geography backwards in a conscious act. It simply and naturally "leans in" on them, and compels *them*. Still Olson knew his own center. Even with a risky over-muchness.

In some ways *Paterson* and Gloucester are only metaphors. Yet out of a certain place — begin. To draw perimeters before

you erase them, to know the place of the first belonging, its local history (ALL history for Olson), its voices, the struggles of parents, the stories of grandparents, a generation whose memory still links us to a richer tradition we think might matter.

For Frost and Williams, even with a more limited historical range, and for Olson who over-reached after an ancient past of the human race, much as for the other poets I have been looking at, the place chose them as much as they chose the place. How do we find the "certain place" of the Baal Shem now, in a country with endless mobility, poets moving wherever their jobs take them? How do we make poetry out of Texas or Idaho if we've grown up in New York? How deep can it go? "The poet becomes threshold," Larry Levis wrote in a recent article in *FIELD*, but how long does it take for "what is out there" to "move inside" and be authentic? And how do we shift from nostalgia to historical memory, or find a tradition, the fuel to light the fire, in the vast, crazy woods of America where the only images or symbols common to most people are bombers unloading over Vietnam or ads for Coca Cola and Johnson's Wax? And where the generations have lost touch with each other?

Americans wander from one place to another, but we are not the exiles I was describing earlier. Our displacement or alienation is not like the exile of Seferis and those European poets like Milosz who carry their past wherever they go. Not even like the exile of Amichai, Gilboa, and Kovner who are more "at home" in Israel than they ever were in Germany, the Ukraine, or Vilna. The wandering of the American poet does not usually make him long for the place where he was born. In fact, he's often glad to be out of it.

Still, something nags at us in our dreams. The search for roots became the contemporary cliché of the sixties and seventies, but it started much earlier and has been going on for a long time. Some wanted, like Olson, to repossess a tradition older than America, some to repossess the America of their childhood, and others, like Lowell in much of his work, to repossess an America constructed out of history and childhood together. A complicated search. James Wright kept returning to Ohio, to the

Shreve High football stadium, to the "hobo jungle weeds/Upstream from the sewer main" along the dying Ohio River, to the great Depression and the WPA swimming pool, until he arrived at his late epiphany and transformation of sorrow and loneliness, "Beautiful Ohio":

Those old Winnebago men
Knew what they were singing.
All summer long and all alone,
I had found a way
To sit on a railroad tie
Above the sewer main.
It spilled a shining waterfall out of a pipe
Somebody had gouged through the slanted earth.
Sixteen thousand and five hundred more or less people
In Martins Ferry, my home, my native country
Quickened the river
With the speed of light.
And the light caught there
The solid speed of their lives
In the instant of that waterfall.
I know what we call it
Most of the time.
But I have my own song for it,
And sometimes, even today,
I call it beauty.

Tranströmer's "lonely water tap," a projection of his own loneliness, on his island, and Wright's "sewer main." This is not the only poem of Wright in which it appears. "All summer long and all alone." Both poets arrive at the same moving perception of Tranströmer's "encircled love." So that Tranströmer's ramshackle hut and Wright's waterfall both shine with an uncanny light. In another poem, "To the Creature of the Creation," Wright says, "The one tongue I can write in/ is my Ohioan."

I think if we put James Wright's Ohio poems together, or Philip Levine's Detroit poems, we might get something like Tranströmer's *Baltics*. A movement through the poet's own

childhood and adolescence, family, poverty and war, the immediate past — toward what may be ultimately the only question — not what does it all mean, but what am I doing here? HERE. As against THERE. HERE might be Reznikoff's Brooklyn ghetto and Manhattan, Donald Junkins' Atlantic coast and Swan's Island, Wendell Berry's Kentucky, or Gerald Stern's Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Or even a place without family connections. The Arizona desert as Richard Shelton knows it, Hugo's small dying towns in Montana, John Haines in Alaska, or the phantasmagoria of Avenue C in New York as Kinnell experienced it.

HERE and THERE. Ginsberg in a supermarket in California or the Wichita vortex or the urban jungle of New York, Robert Hass in northern California and in Buffalo, George Oppen in New York, Maine, and the northern California coast — "that beach is the edge of a nation . . . ," Gary Snyder in the Cascades, or Japan, or the Sierras, and now the whole globe: Turtle Island. Few Americans end up where they started. We have to know many places. As well as we can.

VIII

I have had to leave out too many poets. I have omitted any discussion about translation. After all, the works of Seferis, the Israelis, Tranströmer were quoted only in translation. In being lifted out of their own Greek, Hebrew, Swedish, they have already been located in another "place." But the power of the originals and the skill of the translation still lets us hear approximately where they are coming from.

And I have been acutely aware in thinking about the use of place in poetry, in reading and selecting from some of the world's poets, that I have included no women. Even women who take great chunks of their time and place, history and politics, into their work, are not as consistent in this as the poets I have been discussing.

At the beginning I noted the absence of "somewhere" in the poetry of American women. This seems true of the poems of women I have read in translation as well. Who they are is not where they are. One explanation, of course, is that men never

permitted us to extend our vision, to be engaged in larger events. We were not encouraged to move out of the home and freely into the traffic of the world. Husbands, lovers, editors, critics, and competing male poets have held us back. But I'm not convinced that this is the real explanation, though I may be accused of falling into the trap male psychologists have set for us. It seems clear to me — if only from reading hundreds of women poets — that for women, from Sappho to Emily Dickinson to Adrienne Rich, our bodies, or more precisely our inner spaces, are the center of our experience.

Rich wrote in a letter in 1972 that she was "breaking down the artificial barriers between private and public, between Vietnam and the lover's bed, between the deepest images we carry out of our dreams and the most daylight events 'out in the world.'" But I do not think this duality has anything to do with artificial barriers. Our relationship to the world, to historical events, to myth, to everything we perceive seems to have more to do with the ovaries and the uterus, the geography under our skin, than the geography outside us. Perhaps it *is* a matter of physiology, as studies of Erik Erikson in play construction and other psychologists and anthropologists have demonstrated about the feminine preoccupation with "inner space." (I am not defending Freud's famous dictum that anatomy is destiny. Erikson puts it better: anatomy, history, and personality are our combined destiny.) Whether she regards her equipment, as de Beauvoir maintained, as "a hostile element within her own body," whether she gives birth or not, that space is in a woman with all it implies: menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation. A space that defines her more than anything outside. This is not to say that women don't venture into "outer space." Elizabeth Bishop made a virtue of travel, and I think her work is in a very special class by itself. There are exceptional examples of movement outward, of engagement with time and place, in the work of Muriel Rukeyser and Denise Levertov, and of Anna Akhmatova, the Israeli poet Lea Goldberg, and the German poet Sarah Kirsch. But the bulk of their best work is interior, deep in themselves.

Certainly men share our inwardness, experience "motherliness," the fear of being empty or dried-up, and everything else that goes with that inner hollow. Coming from his greenhouse "womb," Roethke produced one of the finest feminine poems we have, in his mother's voice. But it is not biological. It is not men's standard experience. And it is not nurtured by the culture in which they live. These themes seem more exclusively the property of women.

Ethno-linguists report languages in which men and women use different grammatical forms and partially distinct vocabularies. So why shouldn't their use of subjects and images in poetry be different? We are moving toward an age of so much more freedom for women that history and personality might some day dominate anatomy, and we will write a new kind of poetry. That seems so far off, perhaps in a time when babies will be grown in test-tubes and nourished by machines, that I cannot even think about it. This space in women I have been describing may be a place more real, more connected to ancient myth and family history than any place we can locate in the world. But it's from another region, with a different landscape and language, and a map which is just beginning to be drawn. Women are busy giving birth to themselves.

IX

So I sit at my desk in Jerusalem, looking back at Seattle and San Francisco, looking back at the women in the Bible who keep getting into my poems, looking down through the excavated layers of the First and Second Temples, Roman forum, Moslem mosques, Crusader citadel, Mameluke fountain, Turkish walls, looking into the sad, outrageous history of my people, at the ruins, the arches with nothing behind them, the broken stones, the violent history of this country where I now live, looking out at the guard in front of the mayor's house. He is bored and hot in the bright glare of the afternoon sun. He walks up and down in the shade of the jacaranda tree. Only a few steps in either direction to where the light burns the sidewalk. My husband calls out the window to ask if he's thirsty and takes him a can of beer. The

name of the beer is Maccabee. Our hero who started the Hasmonean dynasty in 145 B.C.

Is this my history? Is this my place? The name of my street is Rashba, an acronym for the Talmudic scholar *Rabbi* Soloman (*Shlomo*) *ben Abraham Adret*, who lived in Barcelona in the thirteenth century. The Jewish encyclopedia says "he distinguished himself by his clear logical thinking and by his critical penetrating understanding." He issued a decree excommunicating anyone who wanted to study philosophy before he was twenty-five. And he attacked the mystical doctrine of some of his contemporaries. It doesn't seem like a good street for a poet to live on.

Sometimes I let this poem of Berryman unhinge me:

Roots

Young men (young women) ask about my 'roots,' —
as if I were a *plant*. Yeats said to me,
with some pretentiousness, I felt even then,
'London is useful, but I always go back
to Ireland, where my roots are.' Mr Eliot,
too, worried about his roots
whether beside the uncontrollable river
the Mississippi, or the Thames, or elsewhere.

I can't see it. Many are wanderers,
both Lawrence, Byron, & the better for it.
Many stay home forever. Hardy: fine.
Bother these bastards with their preconceptions.

The hell with it. Whether to go or stay
be Fate's, or mine, no matter.
Exile is in our time like blood. Depend on
interior journeys taken anywhere.

I'd rather live in Venice or Kyoto,
except for the languages, but
O really I don't care where I live or have lived.
Wherever I am, young Sir, my wits about me,
memory blazing, I'll cope & make do.

Does it negate everything I've been trying to put down here? Don't all of us depend on our interior journeys more than anything else? Exile *is* in our time like blood. But Berryman had a "memory blazing" and couldn't have written those voices of Henry and Mr. Bones without the sound of a place in his head. He protests too much. "Whether to go or stay" does matter. He did much more than "cope & make do." (Though finally he didn't.)

I wanted a good place to settle:
Cold Mountain would be safe.
Light wind in a hidden pine —
Listen close — the sound gets better.
Under it a gray-haired man
Mumbles along reading Huang and Lao.
For ten years I haven't gone back home
I've even forgotten the way by which I came.

That's Snyder's translation of one of the Cold Mountain poems. "I wanted a good place to settle" is the unspoken yearning of Berryman and most of us "exiles." State of mind *and* real place in the mountains of China, Han-Shan in the eighth century (give or take a hundred years) was talking about the place he arrived at. He didn't forget the way by which he came. The poems are full of it.

I cope and make do and read the Hasidic stories:

When the Baal Shem had a difficult task before him, he would go to a certain place in the woods, light a fire and meditate in prayer — and what he had set out to perform was done. . . .

KITCHEN

Flour is exhaustion.
There's always some
in the bag's bottom.

Butter is pain
and in the heat
it can only weep.

Salt is tears,
and cheap.

Onions are the same tunes
to their centers,
always singing to me.
It is their faith
that makes me cry —
they think I'll stop cutting.

Milk is a satisfied whisper.
Oranges
are harmony, one-two,
two-three
and won't subdue
their shape to the bowl.
The child won't subdue
his shape to the shoe.

And the oven
is vast to the toast,
stingy to the turkey.

Broom is the purr
without the cat.

Candles are clever,
clever, clever —
like the cat stretching up
to the handle of the door.

Bones won't go,
bones won't turn
into a rib-cage,
find the leg-bones,
and go.

Sweetie-pie, why
go out with the ashes?
Cookie, why?

GRAVEL

Hot gravel we walked on,
gravel pressing into the callus
that starts in the womb, pressing
and never piercing,
never blood but smooth dark dirt.
How the dark was light
indoors, indoors darker
with the white porcelain
ungiving to the small squashed calves
like sail on bone. So bright,
white shallow water cleans
your feet again, mother,
my heart breaks when I share
these feet with anyone else.
My heart breaks
just to share them.
Your child kneels again
at the window, the dark
is cool and a beacon
blinks on the radio tower.
Light pajamas, thin cotton
and everything
is clean, or dark, or cool
and blinking on and on,
forever let me hear
the drawer close, keep me
kneeling there a while,
let me hear the drawer close
as I sleep clustered
like your one bud of the night.
Let me hear the drawer close
in the old soft cabinet
the rolling wood on wood
to conclusion.

THE WOMAN

The woman
is walking through the brambles
where the golden sheep had idled
leaving enough wool to fill spools.
She is singing,
"They did not leave this
behind for me, they did not
leave this for me."

"But what was left
we under swords have always been
allotted," sings Ruth in fields,
laying herself down at Boaz' heels.

And they were dreaming of one another,
one in one dream, one in another,
one in the golden field,
one in the golden bough.

The wives gather
up egg dishes this morning
in the town, the wives
in the country lift the eggs
out of the hollow.
Debutantes carry baskets
into the dewy garden, following
the early gardeners, cutting
roses with their rose shears.

And I went down
to pick an apple, to pick an apple
off of the tree. And the sound
of the apple dropping, apple dropping,
sent up an echo, sent up an echo
of the graveyard, of the orchard

and the truth of the buried,
of the buried as seed.
Oh buried, you'll leave the graveyard,
leave the graveyard
like the apple tree. Reaching
upward, reaching upward
up to me.

BLUE STONES

— for my son, Nicholas

I suspect
They will slide me onto a cold bed,
A bed that has been brought in,
Out of the night
And past the fraying brick of the warehouse,
Where maybe a workman took an afternoon nap,
And woke staring up
At what sky he could see through one window.
But if he kept staring,
And thought that the bed took its gray color
From the sky, and kept watching that sky
Even after he had finished his cigarette,
He might learn
How things outlive us.
And maybe he would be reminded that the body, too,
Is only a thing, a joke it kept trying to tell us,
And now the moment for hearing it
Is past.
All I will have to decide, then,
Is how to behave during
Those last weeks, when the drawers
Of the dresser remain closed,
And the mirror is calm, and reflects nothing,
And outside, tangled
In the hard branches,
The moon appears.
I see how poor it is,
How it owns nothing.
I look at it a long time, until
I feel empty, as if I had travelled on foot
For three days, and become simple,
The way light was simple on the backs
Of horses as my father approached them,

Quietly, with a bridle.
My father thought dying
Was like standing trial for crimes
You could not remember.
Then someone really does throw
The first stone.
It is blue,
And seems to be made of the sky itself.
The breath goes out of you.
Tonight, the smoke holds still
Against the hills and trees outside this town,
And there is no hope
Of acquittal.

*

But *you*? Little believer, little
Straight, unbroken, and tireless thing,
Someday, when you are twenty-four and walking
through
The streets of a foreign city, Stockholm,
Or Trieste,
Let me go with you a little way.
Let me be that stranger you won't notice,
And when you turn and enter a bar full of young men
And women, and your laughter rises,
Like the stones of a path up a mountain,
To say that no one has died,
I promise I will not follow.
I will cross at the corner in my gray sweater.
I will not have touched you,
As I did, for so many years,
On the hair and the left shoulder.
I will silence my hand that wanted to.
I will put it in my pocket, and let it clutch
The cold, blue stones they give you,
After you have lived.

THINKING OF NEED

First you see the two gray shapes,
framed with yellow light, at the church door.

She helps him with his hat.
She holds his arm. They are so gray.

Then you come to a brown lawn
with tall bare trees. A white house.

Inside, long white tables wait.
Someone is lighting candles there.

Many will marry, the minister says.
The people say *Amen*, thinking of need.

In Aristotle, gray is yellow
deprived of light. Remember this

when you notice the tiny basket
filled with lavender, over the brass bed,

and the branch, through the bedroom window,
where a few pale beech leaves cling. They cling.

Oh, the pronoun. Tenacious unnamed.
The they. The he and she. The you and I.

THE CAR IS RED

The car is red. A girl in white shorts
rubs a chamois between her hands.
Skin, she thinks. A phone rings.
A woman's face by the checked curtain,
a white receiver in her hand.

No, no. The car is white.
The girl's shorts are red, red as the red
ceramic apple on the wall above the phone.
Across the street a boy pedals by.
No. The boy is waiting, on the phone.

This is too red, too white.
Blood and milk. A dishpan in the sink.
The woman's hands in the girl's wet hair —
lacquer, suds. Where is the ring,
the fleck of gold on the apple's cheek? Ah!

The gold in the boy's brown eye,
the brown of his body, his summer hair
like gold. Gold! The small brown buds
on his chest. Hello! What smooth
smooth skin, she'd never touched . . .

She had thought it would all seem red.
The red dress: the deeper skin.
She must have been thinking The red car.
She was the one who painted the apple.
Her best friend painted the gold pear.

Tongue to teeth when they were ten.
Across the street. Under the stair.
Deeper secrets. Their two brown bears.
Brown and gold. White and red.
Body. Body. Body.

Carol Muske

DULCE LIGNUM, DULCES CLAVOS

He watched everything from his cross. At six, I was already determined to help, to distract myself from his gaze, washing the chalk words from the blackboard. After school, I stood on a stool to reach the high sink and turn the black wheels of the faucets. I looked out the window as the pail filled. I saw the boy looking up at me and instantly I was in the middle of a crowd in the street below and he was dead, lying there. The nun knelt and turned my head away, pressing it against her breast, the cold metal crucifix. Her heart beat inside my head. When I stole a glance, I saw how he lay on the rusty cow-catcher, staring at me with the same calculated expression, a kind of dare.

Today someone asked, *Were there still streetcars in 1952?* But that's just it, it doesn't matter: she was holding me against her, I had to invent circumstances in order to see at all. Then, for one second, I understood everything: the chalk letters, the nails, her arms around me, why he had to die for us.

WORRY

for Sister Jeanne d'arc

For some of us, they're the same,
memory and worry. At six, obsessed
with the bough in the lullaby that breaks,
I stayed awake, thinking about a cradle's
wingspan. I took the first lilacs to school

that year in a kind of gauze bunting, expecting
their necks to break before I had them in
the hands of the nun I still call John Dark.
She turned from a window where I often stood

sill-high, afraid to look over the ledge.
On the wall Christ stood on his cross
like a man lashed to a kite. I had been
taught to believe he would hold us all up —

spreading his arms like wings across
the cracked lilies of plaster, spreading
his arms like a florist I once saw stripping
the innocent boughs for blossoms to stick
in chicken wire. *If they take your flowers,*

*they might call you sweetheart, they might
catch you up with your sad bouquet and whirl
you round and round too close to the window
for comfort. Don't forget it was Springtime*

when even nuns get crazy. Don't forget
though it felt like heaven on earth,
we were on the third floor.

CONTRIBUTORS

MARTHA COLLINS has published poetry in numerous magazines. She teaches creative writing at the University of Massachusetts and lives in Cambridge.

JAMES GALVIN's next book of poems, **Imaginary Timber**, is due soon from Doubleday. He teaches at California State University, Humboldt.

SANDRA GILBERT is co-author, with Susan Gubar, of **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination**. Her most recent collection of poems, **In the Fourth World**, was published last year by the University of Alabama Press as part of the AWP Poetry Series. She teaches at the University of California, Davis.

MIROSLAV HOLUB is familiar to readers of *FIELD* through his many contributions and his recent collection, third in the Field Translation Series, *Sagittal Section*. He and his translator, STUART FRIEBERT, worked together on this translation as they did on many of the poems in that volume during Holub's 1979 sojourn in Oberlin.

LAURA JENSEN has appeared in *FIELD* frequently. Her book, **Bad Boats**, is available from Ecco/Viking. She has an N.E.A. Writing Fellowship for 1980

and a new book of poems will appear from a new press, Dragon Gate, in the fall of 1981.

The essay by SHIRLEY KAUFMAN evolved from a N.E.A. residency and teaching stint at Oberlin in the fall of 1979. Her most recent collection of poems is **From One Life to Another**. Her poems have appeared frequently in *FIELD*.

LARRY LEVIS' collection, **The Dollmaker's Ghost**, will be published this spring. He is teaching this year at the Iowa workshop.

W.S. MERWIN is familiar to readers of poetry everywhere. The author of many books of poems and translations and one of the major poets of our time, he now makes his home in Hawaii.

Readers who know our first volume in the Field Translation Series, CHARLES WRIGHT's translation of EUGENIO MONTALE's **The Storm and Other Poems**, will recognize the term "Private Madrigals" as the title of section VI of that collection. In a recent *Collected Poems*, Montale added the three poems translated in this issue to that section as the first three "private madrigals." These translations, then, are addenda to **The Storm**. VINIO ROSSI, who teaches French and Italian

literature at Oberlin, wrote the introduction to that collection; he and DAVID YOUNG have collaborated on translations of Montale in the past, and some of their work can be found in the New Directions **Selected Poems**.

The two poems in this issue by CAROL MUSKE are from her new collection **Skylight**, to be published early in 1981 by Doubleday. She is currently teaching at George Washington University.

DIANE Ó HEHIR is the author of two books of poetry, **Summoned** (Missouri, 1976) and **The Power to Change Geography** (Princeton, 1979). She has had work published in many magazines, and is co-winner this year of the Poetry Society of America's DiCastagnola Award, for a work-in-progress. The poems in this issue will be part of this new collection, to be titled **Second Chances**.

BENJAMIN PERÉT, the great French Surrealist poet, is very familiar to readers of FIELD,

along with his expert translator, KEITH HOLLAMAN, who lives and works in New York City. We hope to publish a selected poems of Perét in the Field Translation Series sometime in the near future.

CHARLES SIMIC has just published an absolutely smashing collection of poems called **Classic Ballroom Dances**.

LOUIS SIMPSON's new book of poems, **Caviare at the Funeral**, is just out from Franklin Watts.

The poems in this issue by TOMAS TRANSTRÖMER are from early work, as the date on one of them indicates. His translator, TIMOTHY DWYER, wishes to thank ROBERT BECKLEN, of the Oberlin College Psychology Department, for his help with the Swedish.

NANCY WILLARD's new book of poems for children, **I'm There, Said the Air: William Blake's Inn for Innocent And Experienced Travelers**, is just out from Harcourt Brace.

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